

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

11150 EAST BOULEVARD AT UNIVERSITY CIRCLE
CLEVELAND, OHIO 44106 CABLE ADDRESS: MUSART CLEVELAND
SHERMAN E. LEE, DIRECTOR TELEPHONE: 421-7340

June 28, 1978

FOR RELEASE ON RECEIPT

ANCIENT PERSIAN ART TREASURES EXHIBITED AT MUSEUM BEGINNING JULY 7

The Royal Hunter: Art of the Sasanian Empire, an exhibition on view at The Cleveland Museum of Art from July 7 through August 13, examines the artistic achievements of an ancient Persian people who ruled what is now Iran and Iraq and much of central Asia from 226 to 651 A.D.

Through conquest and trade--for a time they controlled the silk route across Asia--the Sasanian kings amassed great wealth, enabling them to furnish their palaces with objects of extraordinary beauty and luxury, such as the splendid silver vessels which are the focus of this exhibition. These and other works of art on exhibit reflect both native Persian traditions and influences from foreign cultures, particularly the neighboring Roman and Byzantine Empires.

The forms and motifs of Sasanian art were in turn adopted by peoples of widely varying cultures. Elements of their art can be found in objects produced in China during the T'ang Dynasty, in early Islamic art and even in the arts of medieval Europe.

Despite its widespread influence, Sasanian art is not well known. Much of the art and architecture of the Sasanians was lost or fell into ruin following the conquest of their empire by the Moslems. Their most impressive surviving monuments are the massive reliefs carved on Iranian mountain cliffs, depicting the triumphs of the Sasanian kings, and a few architectural ruins, notably the huge vaulted audience hall of the royal palace at Ctesiphon in Iraq.

(more)

Also surviving, and represented in this exhibition, are superbly crafted objects of silver, gold, and bronze, stucco architectural reliefs, fragments of wool and silk textiles, ceramic and glass vessels, and stamp seals carved from semi-precious stones. The exhibition, organized by the Asia House Gallery in New York City, consists of approximately 90 objects selected from collections in Europe, America, and Iran by Prudence Oliver Harper, Curator of Ancient Near Eastern Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Among the most important and beautiful objects on display are six silver plates decorated with scenes of Sasanian kings hunting--from which the exhibition takes its title. The theme of the royal hunt, symbolizing the king's prowess and invincibility, is a common motif in Sasanian art, especially on the silver plates that were presented as gifts from Sasanian kings to foreign rulers. Many such plates have been discovered in regions outside the former Sasanian domain, chiefly in the Soviet Union, where they also may have gone as objects of trade or booty from wars.

Probably designed for ceremonial occasions are four magnificent silver-gilt rhyta or drinking vessels, including two from the collection of The Cleveland Museum of Art--one in the shape of a horse, another combining a female head with that of an Indian buffalo. Less elaborate, but equally beautiful, are silver bowls, ewers, and vases depicting scenes of court life--banquets, games, and entertainments with musicians. Other motifs appearing on silver vessels--dancing females, scenes of winemaking, and men and animals in combat--may have had a symbolic or religious significance.

Gold, which embellishes many of the silver vessels, also adorns an iron bridle and one of the most dazzling objects in the exhibition--a sword hilt and scabbard covered with delicately worked designs in gold granulation and foil. Sasanian metalworking skill is also seen in a group of bronze objects, including bowls and other tableware, a helmet, and a furniture leg with the forepart of a griffin.

3--art of the sasanian empire

Since only a few of their cities have been excavated, little is known about Sasanian architecture. At Kish in Iraq and other sites, plaques of carved and molded stucco--used to mask as well as decorate masonry walls in important buildings--have been uncovered. More than a dozen such plaques, depicting plant forms, human busts, animals, and birds, are shown here. Also on display are two mosaic floor panels uncovered during the excavation of a third-century palace in Bishapur in Iran.

Illustrations and essays on the use and significance of each of the objects in this exhibition, as well as a history of the Sasanians, are contained in the catalog prepared by Dr. Harper for this exhibition. The 175-page paperbound catalog can be obtained from the Museum Sales Desk for \$7.00.

During the exhibition, a free pamphlet on Sasanian art, prepared by the Museum's Department of Art History and Education, will also be available, and a 30-minute slide tape, entitled The Royal Hunter, will run continuously in the Museum's audio-visual center. Talks on the exhibition will be given at 1:30 p.m. daily from July 19 through July 25 and on August 2 and 6. A special lecture on Sasanian art will be presented by Barbara Kathman, instructor in the Department of Art History and Education, at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, July 19, as part of the Museum's July Wednesday Evening Festivals. Miss Kathman is also offering a three-part course on Sasanian arts scheduled on three consecutive Thursdays, from July 27 through August 10, at 1:30 p.m.

The exhibition is supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Mobil Oil Corporation. The Cleveland showing is assisted by a grant from the Ohio Arts Council.

#

#

#

For additional information or photographs, please contact Ann Edwards, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.